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ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

PRESENTATION
ON
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 5, 1990

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

OPSBA PRESENTATION TO LEGISLATIVE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Under other circumstances, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association would have been pleased to present its views on early childhood education to the Legislative Select Committee on Education. However, the inadequate time lines for the development of a position paper on this most important issue have made it impossible for our Association to develop a paper reflective of the concerns and interests of our 92 members!

As a result, instead of making a full presentation on early childhood education we will summarize recent Ministry of Education policy decisions in this area, past studies focusing on early childhood education and highlight, by posing a number of questions, various areas of concern in early childhood education which we feel must be addressed.

We wonder what can be accomplished by hearings into early childhood education at a time when major policy decisions in this area have already been made by the government. With no prior consultation with school boards, or other interested parties, major policy decisions requiring mandatory provision of junior kindergarten, full-day senior kindergarten, the formative years, and the role of schools in the provision of child care have been announced.

The Ministry of Education has been restructured to implement these decisions, and the only designated role for school boards is to participate in discussions with regard to implementation. The initiatives themselves have been identified as not debatable.

We wonder about the efficacy of further hearings when so much study of this issue has led to so little action.

In May 1985 the Report of the Early Primary Education Project was released. The result of many months of extensive consultation with the various groups involved in the learning of the young child, the Report presented 42 recommendations for change which would allow those who share responsibility for the care and education of young children to respond more effectively to their learning needs.

Although this report endorsed the goals and objectives of the Formative Years, recommendations for change were made with regard to curriculum, teacher education and certification, and community services. An implementation plan including the use of pilot studies was proposed. Interested parties were given a year to respond to the recommendations. As yet, there has been no official government response to the report.

We would urge the Select Committee to carefully consider the Early Primary Education Report and its recommendations.

In order to underline the complexity of the issue, OPSBA would like to highlight a number of areas that must be considered when addressing the issue of early childhood education. Many issues surrounding early childhood education for Ontario's public school boards deal with both governance and finance, as well as curriculum and program.

The lack of consensus which currently exists on the role of education needs to be considered. This was raised by our Association in our previous submission to this Committee on the Financing of Education.

* Philosophy of early childhood education

1. What is to be the philosophy of education in the early years?

* Half-day junior and full-day senior kindergarten

1. What is the impact on the capital needs of school boards particularly in high growth areas?
2. What are to be the required teacher qualifications and
   how do these relate to an impending teacher shortage?
3. Is the class size to be mandated and how will it relate to the maximum class size objectives for grades one and two?
4. What will be the impact on school board/teacher negotiations if class sizes continue to be mandated?
5. Early childhood education at the junior kindergarten level necessitates changes in the later years of the primary program. It must not be treated in isolation.
6. What impact will full-day senior kindergarten have on the grade one program?
7. Should priority for full-day senior kindergarten programs be given to children most likely to be at risk of school failure?
8. Costs involved in developing appropriate curriculum must be considered.

* Coordination with other community programs, child care and the role of school boards in the provision of child care

1. There is the need for clarification of the role of school boards in the provision of child care.
2. Inter-ministerial cooperation is essential.
3. There are differing space requirements for child care centres as compared to kindergarten programs. How are these to be reconciled?
4. How do these programs relate to the need for before-and-after school child care?

5. Will the Ministry of Education's proposed new transportation grants pay to bus children to Junior Kindergarten programs from both the children's homes, as well as from child care locations?

* Teacher training and certification
    1. What qualifications should be required for early primary education?
    2. Is it necessary to maintain current certification requirements?
    3. What role can ECE graduates play in the provision of early childhood education?
    4. What implications will Pay Equity have for school boards if early childhood education graduates are involved in program delivery in the education system?
    5. In-service programs need to be developed.
    6. How do these initiatives in early childhood education relate to the impending teacher shortage?
    7. What costs will be involved in teacher upgrading, training and in-service?

* Funding of Early Childhood Education
    1. How does the differential level of funding for elementary and secondary school students relate to the importance of early childhood education?

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but indicative of areas with which we have concerns. We would be pleased to present our views on these important topics at a later date, when a more meaningful discussion, based on adequate consultation with our Member Boards, can take place.